

Written Testimony before the Appropriations Committee

My greetings to the members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Matthew Sheehan and I live in Glastonbury, and I am forwarding this written testimony for your consideration.

I understand that the state of Connecticut is facing a considerable deficit, which likely cannot be solved without budget cuts. I also understand the importance of balancing the state budget and upholding best financial practices that affect the state's credit ratings. That having been said, I am gravely concerned about the Governor's proposal to cut funding allocations to non-profit mental health providers, and to cut reimbursements to doctors and hospitals. I encourage the committee to not make reductions to either of these needs.

Although I am pleased that the state has embraced the expansion of Medicaid under the health care reform law, Medicaid clients need to be able to access services for any physical and mental health care needs. An underlying intent of health care reform was to encourage clients to get earlier and more preventive treatment, which is in the long run much less costly for the government. If there are not options for clients to receive care because providers cannot afford to provide it, this will be a major step backward.

I personally can attest to each of these challenges. As a client of Inter Community in East Hartford, their outpatient services have prevented me from needing inpatient treatment or any other services from Social Services. One way to look at this would be this is a cost-effective way to do things. Another way to look at this is it provides people with disabilities or mental health needs to live meaningful and productive lives rather than as "wards of the state." In a state where we still have institutions in the form of the Southbury Training School, we should be working to increase the role of non-profit providers. Maintaining their funding for existing needs would be a good first step.

In regard to doctor and hospital reimbursement rates, the governor's reasoning of fewer uninsured clients is not the full picture. While more clients having Medicaid and not without insurance is a victory, the historical disparity between Medicaid reimbursement and private insurance cannot be ignored. There was a point in the past where it was impossible for clients to find any physician in the state accepting Medicaid. More recently, the office of the physician I have had since birth accepted us clients because of the higher reimbursements being offered. This progress cannot be undone. In the system we have, this directly affects patients and having coverage that may be utilized. Again, it is more cost effective to encourage people to utilize doctors and walk-in clinics as opposed to the emergency room that has been historically the go-to place for those who are desperate.

After the tragedy of Sandy Hook, the governor had some worthy rhetoric regarding addressing mental health issues, but his budget two years ago did not back it. The legislature then made some better decisions, and I hope the same is done again this year. Thank you for your consideration.